

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 SSM-03 IO-13 /080 W
-----070607Z 045412 /14

R 061109Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6026
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MENAHEM BEGIN

1. CHARGE' AND POLITICAL OFFICER MET WITH MENAHEM BEGIN
IN HIS HOME ON MAY 4. THE DISCUSSION OPENED WITH THE
ELECTION NIGHT SCHEDULE AND THE GOVERNMENT-FORMATION
PROCESS. BEGIN SAID THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS COVERING
ALL BUT FIVE OR SIX SEATS WOULD BE KNOWN BY THREE OR
FOUR A.M. MAY 18 (LOCAL TIME). DISTRIBUTION OF THE
REMAINING FEW SEATS WOULD DEPEND ON THE SOLDIER VOTE,
ABSENTEE BALLOTS, AND THE ALLOCATION OF VOTES FOR
PARTIES THAT FAILED TO REACH THE MINIMUM NECESSARY
FOR A SEAT. THE RESULTS WILL BE OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED
TWO WEEKS AFTER ELECTION DAY; FOLLOWING SEPARATE
CONSULTATIONS WITH ALL THE PARTY LEADERS, THE
PRESIDENT ON THE FOLLOWING MONDAY (JUNE 6) WILL GIVE TO
ONE OF THEM THE MANDATE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT.
THE PARTY LEADER CHOSEN THEN WILL HAVE THREE
WEEKS TO FORM A GOVERNMENT; THIS CAN BE EXTENDED
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FOR THREE MORE. IF HE FAILS, THE PRESIDENT WILL
TURN TO THE LEADER OF ANOTHER PARTY, ALTHOUGH
THEORETICALLY HE COULD EXTEND THE MANDATE TO
ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL OF THE FIRST PARTY.

2. BEGIN PROFESSED TO SEE THE POLLS AS UNCLEAR IN
THEIR CONCLUSIONS. HE NOTED THAT THE LIKUD

WAS STRONG AMONG THE YOUTH, PARTICULARLY ON
CAMPUSES AND IN THE MILITARY; AND HE THOUGHT THIS
A HOPEFUL SIGN FOR THE FUTURE.

3. HE DISMISSED THE SUGGESTION HEARD FROM SEVERAL
QUARTERS THAT THE LIKUD WOULD OFFER YADIN THE
PREMIERSHIP AS AN INDUCEMENT FOR THE DMC TO JOIN
A COALITION WITH THE LIKUD, COMMENTING THAT IF
THE LIKUD IS THE LARGER PARTY IT WOULD BE
UNDEMOCRATIC FOR IT TO PRESENT THE PREMIERSHIP
TO ITS JUNIOR COALITION PARTNER. HE DID NOT
THINK THAT THE DMC'S SEVEN CONDITIONS FOR ITS
PARTICIPATION IN A GOVERNMENT (SEE SEPTTEL) OFFERED
INSUPERABLE OBSTACLES TO THE LIKUD. THE FOREIGN
POLICY CONDITION (THAT THERE BE NO POLICY
CONTRADICTING THE DMC PLATFORM) COULD BE ACCEPTABLE
TO THE LIKUD. BEGIN WOULD ALSO ACCEPT ELECTORAL
REFORM, ALTHOUGH NOT ELECTIONS WITHIN TWO YEARS
BECAUSE, HE EXPLAINED, ANOTHER ELECTION SO SOON
AFTER THIS ONE WOULD BE REJECTED BY THE PUBLIC.
THE PEOPLE WANT ACTION AND A KNESSET ELECTION
MENAS VIRTUAL GOVERNMENT PARALYSIS FOR SIX MONTHS
PRIOR TO THE POLLING DATE. HE WAS SURE THAT THE
DMC WOULD ACCEPT A COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD INVOLVE
ELECTORAL REFORM BUT NOT EARLY ELECTIONS.

4. BEGIN SPOKE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A POST-
ELECTION ALIGNMENT WITH THE NRP. HE HAD RECEIVED
ASSURANCES FROM NRP LEADERS THAT THEY WOULD
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COOPERATE WITH THE LIKUD. THE NRP'S YOUNGER
ELEMENTS SAW EYE-TO-EYE WITH HIM, AND AN ARRANGE-
MENT COULD BE FOUND WITH THE RELIGIOUS PARTY
TO ENHANCE THE LIKUD'S PROSPECTS OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT.

5. HE SAW NO POSSIBILITY OF AN ALIGNMENT-LIKUD
COALITION. HE NOTED MORE IN SORROW THAN ANGER
THAT PERES (WHOM HE LIKES AND REGARDS AS A FRIEND)
HAD MADE A COMMITMENT TO MAPAM NOT TO ENTER SUCH A
COALITION. MOREOVER, MANY IN THE LIKUD OPPOSE A
GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY; THEY ARE CONVINCED
THAT AFTER 29 YEARS THE ALIGNMENT MUST GO INTO
OPPOSITION. NEVERTHELESS, HE REMAINS OF THE
OPINION THAT A WALL-TO-WALL COALITION OF ALL
PARTIES EXCEPT RAKAH WAS A POSSIBILITY. (HE ALSO
THOUGHT THAT SHELI WOULD DECLINE THE INVITATION.)

6. TURNING TO THE CAMPAIGN, BEGIN GOOD-NATUREDLY
COMPLAINED ABOUT AN ALIGNMENT TV COMMERCIAL

SHOWING A DISMAYED ISRAELI PUBLIC ON THE MORROW
OF A LIKUD VICTORY. HE SAID HE HAD TAKEN PERES
TO TASK FOR THE COMMERCIAL AND THE LATTER HAD
APOLOGIZED. BEGIN ADMITTED THAT ONE OF THE
LIKUD'S ADS (LUMPING PERES WITH ASHER YADLIN AND
AVRAHAM OFER) ALSO WAS IN BAD TASTE.

7. BEGIN FAVORS A CRACK AT AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT
AND SAID THAT A LIKUD GOVERNMENT WOULD GO TO GENEVA.
IT WOULD HAVE TO BE FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRE-
CONDITIONS, HOWEVER. HE EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN OVER
WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS HINTS OF A RETREAT BY THE ADMINISTRATION
FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM COMMITMENT NOT TO IMPOSE A SETTLEMENT.

8. COMMENT: CONSIDERING HIS ILLNESS (BEGIN SAID HE
HAD BOTH PNEUMONIA AND A HEART ATTACK) HE LOOKED
QUITE FIT--MUCH BETTER THAN HE HAD THE PREVIOUS
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WEEK ON TV. JUDGING FROM THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE HE
IS SEEING NOW, HE SEEMS TO HAVE RETURNED TO A
FAIRLY ACTIVE SCHEDULE. HOWEVER, THERE WAS A
NOTICEABLE ABSENCE OF EXUBERANCE OVER THE
ELECTION OR CONFIDENCE THAT HE WOULD HEAD THE
NEXT GOVERNMENT. UNLIKE HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER,
EZER WEIZMAN, BEGIN MADE NO CLAIMS ABOUT WINNING
THE ELECTION--AND IN THIS HE IS ALMOST
CERTAINLY RIGHT.
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